

LECTURE III.

IN the church founded by Columba, and which from its birthplace in Iona reached forth and overspread the land, we recognise the parent of the National Church of Scotland. It was the first to take a firm, and, as it proved, a permanent, hold upon the territories which were, by-and-by, consolidated into the Scottish Kingdom. The Scottish Church of to-day is the direct descendant and heir of the Church of the saint and evangelist of Iona. From the first it had distinctive features of its own, which indicated a special character and parentage, and in which it differed from the Churches of the continent of Europe. In particular, it was organised upon a system, and governed on a principle, peculiar to itself, and unrecognised by those Churches in which, by the sixth century, diocesan episcopacy had been fully developed. The organisation was

monastic, not congregational; the government was abbatial, not episcopal.

Whence came, or how originated, this difference? To find an answer to this question we must turn to the East, at a date long anterior to Columba's ministry in Iona. The germ of the Columban Church—that in which its differentiating idea originated—is to be found in the monasticism of the valley of the Nile. Of that monasticism S. Antony was the founder. Antony was an Egyptian of noble birth,—his native place Coma, a village close to the boundary between Lower and Upper Egypt, where he was born in or about the year 251. His parents died, and while yet a youth he succeeded to their estate. Not long after, he heard read in the church the words addressed by Christ to the young man, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow Me." They wrought on him like magic. He at once resolved to obey them. He divested himself of his property, and sought the society of a solitary near Coma, who instructed him in the ascetic life. These "Eremites" or "Anchorites"—men of the desert, or withdrawers from the world—were scattered up and down the country. After a time, spent in extreme self-mortification, he took up his abode in a

remote and deserted castle among the mountains, the door of which he is said not to have opened for twenty years. The fame of his asceticism, and of his conflicts with the evil one, drew visitors from many parts of Egypt, with whom he would converse, though he would neither let them cross his threshold nor see his face. It was not till Diocletian's persecution that he emerged from his retreat, and resolved to found a religious settlement among these mountains, lying between the Nile and the Red Sea, where he chose a spot among the wildest and steepest of them. His abode was a cell hewn out of the rock; and soon the sides of the mountains all around were full of cells and huts; and so vast grew the bands of his disciples that they overflowed from these fastnesses into the deserts on the other side of the river. As the revered head of all these solitaries Antony lived to his 105th year, developing among them the idea of the *cœnobite life*—that is, the common life—or life of the solitary, no longer in an absolute solitude and renunciation of all commerce with his kind, but forming one of a great community dwelling in adjacent cells or huts, acknowledging the authority of a common master. Later, this idea was merged in that of the monastery, in which the brethren dwelt under one roof.

This further development is traceable not to Antony so much as to Pachomius, who, after Antony's death, brought the monks together in a large establishment and under a definite rule. Pachomius founded his society on the island of Tabennæ in the Upper Nile; and it was joined by 3000 members, who later increased to 7000. The abbat, as we should call him, was over all this great company. The name, from the Syriac *abbas*, meant father, and designated the original idea of his relation to his followers. The Greek title was "Archimandrite," which conveyed the slightly different idea of the chief shepherd of a *μάνδρα* or fold. But whether its head was called *father* or *shepherd*, the idea of the relation was patriarchal; and the community was regarded as a family or flock, which, however large, was under him as its head. Every cloister or *canonibium*, however distant from the original and central cell, owned the authority and followed the rule of the abbat. The fame of these great associations of ascetics, withdrawn from the world in order to follow what they believed to be the behests of the higher life, attracted crowds of admirers and devotees from other lands, and especially from Western Europe. Among others Cassian, whose name was known in Southern Gaul, in connection with the semi-Pelagian school of theology there, visited the

Nile and its most celebrated monasteries, and carried back with him an extraordinary account of the marvels he had seen there,—of the 5000 monks on the mountains where S. Antony had lived in his cell; of the 5000 in the desert of Nitria; of the 50,000 who would assemble together to celebrate the Easter Communion; of their meagre diet, of their macerations of “the flesh,” of their continual devotions. And Cassian was not a solitary visitor. There were many besides him who returned from Egypt full of the holy ambition of founding pious retreats, similar to those they had seen there, on the islands which stud the western coasts of the Mediterranean. The sea was to these retreats what the Nile or the desert was to their Egyptian prototypes; and the Egyptian model of the monastic life was faithfully reproduced in them.

Intercourse, social, commercial, and intellectual, between Egypt and Gaul was constant, and had been established for ages before the Christian era. The ancestors of those Marseillais, who in the present century have dedicated a monument with the inscription, “*Les descendants des Phocéens à Homère,*” were proud of their connection with the East. Ephesus, Antioch, and Alexandria found their way to Gaul without making Rome a stage on the journey. When Jerome’s eulogies of monasticism were resented by Roman

society, so angrily that he saw it was best for him to retire to Bethlehem with Paula and Eustochium, the asceticism of the Nile was already winning its way among hundreds of devotees in Liguria and Gallia Narbonensis. The most notable of their communities was that in the isles of Lerins. The visitor to the bright health-haunt of Cannes, at this day, looks across the blue waters of the Golfe de Jouan to these islands, S. Marguerite and S. Honorat. The former is connected, in all historical imaginations, with the mystery of "the man in the iron mask," and with the escape from prison of Bazaine, the betrayer of Metz; the latter is associated with the name of one of the early disciples of the Egyptian monasticism. From that island the system spread through Western Europe, and became as familiar as the famous definition of the true creed which its great doctor, S. Vincent, dictated from the monastery of S. Honorat.¹ The seven chapels, which may still be seen among the ruins, remind one, like similar groups in Ireland, of the tradition of the seven churches of the Apocalypse, and the Eastern origin of the founders. Here Cassian, if he did not actually teach, was known as a revered teacher in his neighbouring monastery of S. Victor, and as an opponent of the severe dogmas

¹ "Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus, creditum sit."

of Augustine of Hippo. Here too Martin's name was not unfamiliar, for he had lived for a time in the island of Gallinaria, off the Ligurian coast. And hither, with other seekers after light, came Patrick, said to be Martin's sister's son, a youth from Northern Britain.¹

Patrick's history, like that of most of his notable contemporaries, is obscured by the haze of imaginative tradition that hangs over it, like the morning mist over a distant hillside; but what we can discern through the haze may be reduced to this: Early in the fourth century there was among the Christians of Strathclyde one Potitus, a priest. Clerical celibacy was in those days unknown in Britain; and Potitus had a son called Calpurnius, who held the rank of deacon in the Church and of "decurion" in the Roman civil service. The decurion was a member of the local council, which was appointed under the Roman administration, wherever a population of a few hundreds was assembled in a town or village. Calpurnius, who thus combined in his own person the ecclesiastical office of deacon and the civil office of town councillor, had a son, who in the language of the country was called "Succath" (a name still surviving, almost unchanged, in the estate of Succoth near Glasgow), but who also bore the Latin

¹ Jocelin's *Life of Patrick*, chap. i.

name Patricius, which implied honourable descent on the part of the bearer. The place where he was born, and where his father was town councillor, was most probably at or near Dunbarton—the only place in the fourth century of great strength, and therefore in all likelihood the only place of considerable population, on the Clyde, and close to the protecting Roman rampart. The addition of the Latin name Patricius to the Celtic Succath suggests that Patrick was the son of a family Celtic by race, but which had adopted the civilisation and the Christianity of the Roman rulers of the island. As Patrick grew up, the West of Scotland was again and again ravaged by the Picts from beyond the wall, and by the Scots from across the channel. In one of the Scots' incursions the country-house of Calpurnius was attacked, and Patrick, then a boy of sixteen, was along with his sister carried off by the marauders. They sold the girl as a slave to a purchaser from Connaught: Patrick himself was kept in bondage in the family of a chieftain on the Antrim coast, and six years elapsed ere he effected his escape. At the end of that time he fled, and got on board a vessel bound for France. His life in France is obscure; but it seems fairly certain he went to Lerins, and studied there the system and mode of life which had been transplanted thither from the

East. In his own "Confession" — preserved in the 'Book of Armagh' in the library of Trinity College, Dublin—he says nothing of having received a commission from Rome to constitute him the missionary of Ireland, though the tradition, repeated by many Roman Catholic historians, is, that he was so commissioned and consecrated as bishop by Pope Cœlestine. There is nothing in what we know of his work in Ireland to suggest that he had received either Roman training or Roman sanction. The idea that he did is scouted by his most erudite biographer, Dr Todd, who does not question the tradition of his having, like Ninian, visited his uncle, S. Martin, at Tours.

It was probably about the year 432 that his mind became so drawn to the island whose inhabitants had torn him from his home and held him in slavery, that he felt impelled to revisit it, and to return good for its evil by proclaiming to it the Gospel of Christ. He accordingly quitted France and landed on the Irish coast, first near Wicklow, and next farther north, at a point which gave him easy access to the region where he had as a youth been held in captivity, and which he now made his base of evangelistic operations. In these his early acquired knowledge of the people, their language, and their customs, stood him in good

stead. His own zeal and power were apostolic, and ere long he had shaken the common paganism of Ireland to its foundation. He followed the usual course of Celtic missionaries, in addressing himself to the chiefs. When they yielded to him their people yielded too. Before he died—at a great age, towards the close of the fifth century—he had virtually Christianised Ireland. He had naturalised on Irish soil the monastic system which he had studied abroad. He had founded scores of churches, and had ordained scores of bishops, of the congregational or tribal sort. He had established the primacy of the Irish Church at Armagh, a century and a half before the see of Canterbury was founded by Augustine, and 118 years before Columba landed in Iona. It was in the monastic schools of this Church that Columba was trained: with its system of administration and scheme of doctrine and ritual he was familiar. It was these he carried with him to Scotland; and in accordance with these he organised the Church which he established among the Scots of Argyll and planted amongst the Picts of Northern Alban.¹

The first and most distinctive feature in the organisation of the Church of Patrick and Columba was the subordination of the bishop and

¹ These two peoples, we must understand, were but separate branches of the one great Celtic race.

the pre-eminence of the abbat. Not that in Ireland the bishops were few, but that they were ecclesiastically obscure and impotent compared with the abbat. S. Patrick, who was ordained Bishop by Germanus of Auxerre,¹ whom he had visited in Gaul, imparted to others the commission he had himself received, with a free hand. But they were bishops in the apostolic, not in the Roman, sense. S. Bernard complains of the gross irregularities, as he thought them, that, even in his time, prevailed in Ireland, where, he says, "almost every church has its separate bishop." These were the ministers of separate congregations; but besides these there were bishops unattached—who had no congregation and no special see—and some who were the bishops of septs or families, and some who were bishops *honoris causâ*. All this was most offensive to the formalists of Rome. The principle of church government on the Continent was conformity and obedience to Rome. The principle of church government in Ireland was national independence of Rome, and obedience to her own authorities, who were not the bishops, but the abbats. Bishops who presided over a single church, and others who owned no allegiance to

¹ This appears the most probable source of his orders. For a succinct statement of the argument in its favour see Stokes's 'Ireland and the Celtic Church,' Lect. iii.

Rome, and who, impelled by the apostolic spirit of evangelism, went "everywhere preaching the Word," were not proper bishops at all, from the papal point of view. Some of these repaired to the Continent in their zeal to evangelise; but they met with but a cold reception from their Continental brethren. The "episcopi vagantes" were formally repudiated, and their right to ordain was denied, by more than one Continental Council.

When Columba had established his monastery in Iona, the authority of the abbat gained a constantly expanding prerogative, while the position of the bishops diminished in importance, and their numbers decreased. As the abbat rose, the bishop sank. He evidently was regarded as having some special duty in connection with the conferring of orders, and a part in celebrating the Eucharist different from that of the ordinary priest; but whatever was implied in the original meaning of an episcopate—a superintendence or overseership—belonged to the abbat, not to him. Where a new centre of Christian life was created—a new mission planted, and a new congregation gathered—the monk was in charge, and over the monk was the abbat, and the abbat only. There might be bishops in the monastery; but if there were, they were under the abbat's rule, and had to obey his bidding. They could ordain, but not

without his leave. This power of ordaining had presumably accrued to them, in the West, as well as in the East, because they were *primi inter seniores*. The elders were originally, as we have seen, the leaders of the congregation. As the congregation grew, their duties became more special; and by-and-by they were regarded as in some degree apart from the other brethren—clergy, not laity. From among them the president, who gradually developed into the bishop, was selected (not always, however, as is proved by the cases of Ambrose at Milan, and of Nectarius at Constantinople). Around him, as *primus*, stood the elders from whom he had been chosen. They assisted him in ordaining and in every duty, in which he took the leading part.

A distinct idea, however, controlled the government of the Columban Church. It was the idea of the superiority of personal to official qualification for office. The bishop's claim, where the government was episcopal, was official; the abbat's was personal. The one represented the authority of office; the other the authority of character. This was the stronger, before which the other shrank. The Roman love of exact order and deference to precise law did not attract the Celtic mind and excite the Celtic sympathy. Loyalty to a leader and enthusiasm for a cause did. Besides, in Alban as in Erin, imperial Rome had never mas-

tered the country, and parcelled it out into those territorial divisions, on the lines of which the Church organised itself in subjugated provinces. Among the Scots,¹ says Bishop Reeves, "the spiritual jurisdiction of the bishop was coextensive with the temporal sway of the chieftains,"—in those cases where the bishop was specially connected with the chieftain's family or clan, and not with a particular monastery or church. A diocesan episcopate, or an episcopate independent of the abbat, or rendering fealty to a foreign bishop at Rome or elsewhere, was unknown. And the abbat was a presbyter, not a bishop. Columba was a presbyter; and so was each of his successors.

The monastery of the Irish type differed widely from that of Monte Cassino, and from that of the medieval monkery, as known in this country after the eleventh century. The establishment at Iona had few features in common with the Melrose, Arbroath, or Paisley of later days. The buildings, of wood, or clay, and wattles, consisted of the church, or oratory; the abbat's house; the guest-house; the kitchen; the refectory; the mill and kiln; and the huts of the

¹ It is hardly necessary to say that at the time referred to "Scoti" was the name of the inhabitants of Ireland (Scotia or Erin). Later it was confined to those emigrants who crossed over to the west of Scotland.

monks. The abbat's house stood higher than the rest, and somewhat apart from the group; and the whole was enclosed with a "rath" or rampart for protection. The monk was not necessarily a priest; but, whether or not, he had taken the monastic vows, and wore the tonsure, and was the son and servant of the abbat. The community was the abbat's "family." His authority was patriarchal and absolute, not only over the mother monastery, but over all its affiliated communities and churches. The monks were divided into three ranks,—the seniors; the working brethren; and the pupils, who were under instruction. Possession of personal property and marriage were forbidden. Obedience to the abbat must be implicit. Discipline was strict; and enforced, if need be, with the lash. There was daily worship at the canonical hours, to which, on Sundays and saints' days, was added the celebration of the Eucharist.

Like all the rest of Christendom, Columba observed the yearly festivals of the Church connected with the seasons of Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. But the date on which Easter was kept did not coincide with that on which it was kept at Rome; and the tonsure of the Columbans differed from the Roman tonsure. These two usages, in themselves of comparatively small account, yet, as we shall afterwards

see, deemed of great moment at a later date, were the most noticeable of the material marks of the Columban independence of the Church of Rome. As regarded dogma and usage, perhaps the most obvious difference was the absence of any trace of Mariolatry. The real divergence between them consisted not so much in doctrine or observance as in mode of life and government, and the whole tone and character of the clergy. The ecclesiastical type was of an essentially different order. Fasts were frequent, and strictly observed. The dress was a woollen tunic worn under a dark gown or hooded cloak of the same materials; on the feet, sandals. The chief occupations of the older brethren were the performance of divine service, and reading and copying the sacred Scriptures. The middle-aged and active tilled the ground, tended cattle, and looked after the necessary economies of the society.

The doctrines held by the brethren of such an establishment as this were, as far as we can judge, in general accordance with those of the Church at large, as embodied in the Nicene Creed. There is no indication of Arianism having made its way to Iona, or even to Ireland. There is more reason to believe that the ideas of Pelagius, himself a Briton, and venerated at Lerins, found favour among these monks of the West. Adamnan's narrative helps

us to apprehend what the Columban doctrines were, as far as shown forth in the Columban ritual. The Lord's Supper was celebrated much like the Roman mass, though with differences to be noticed later. Here, as on the continent of Europe, the primitive idea of the Eucharist had passed away, and instead of the table with the presiding minister and the fraternal communion of the brethren, we have the altar, the priest, and the sacrifice. Columba celebrated mass for the souls of the departed; but evidently not with the idea of thereby mediating with God on their behalf, but by way of showing reverence and loving remembrance, and giving thanks for those whom God had taken to Himself. When Brendan died in Ireland, Columba knew of it by some intuition or revelation, and immediately ordered the mass to be prepared—"for this," said he, "is the birthday of the blessed Brendan." And on another occasion he bade his monks add the name of Columban, who had died the night before, to the names commemorated in the intercessory prayer. In each of these cases his practice differed from any now known either to Catholic or Protestant. The Protestant would refuse to celebrate the Communion in honour of a departed friend, or to insert his name in the prayers; and the Catholic would regard the service as mediatorial.

At this point, as at others, we see in the Columban belief and usage proof of that closer connection with the East than with Rome which is a note of the Celtic Church. In the Latin theology the idea of a purgatorial period after death had taken root—the idea of an intermediate state in which the departed awaited the consummation of their bliss. From this had grown up the cognate idea that their release might be expedited by the efforts of their friends on earth. Hence sacraments and prayers for the dead. But prayers for the dead, offered with this object, differed widely in spirit and meaning from that devout remembrance and giving of thanks which had characterised the purer faith of the early Church, and which inspired the belief and practice of the Celtic monks. Their ideas here are Eastern rather than Latin. So, too, were their ideas about the invocation of the saints, or, as Columba would have put it, prayer to the departed now with the Lord, asking their help and intercession. This was common in the Columban Church; and it appears to us rather the expression of a simple trust in their abiding interest in the welfare of those left behind on earth, and of a conviction of their near though unseen presence, than a practice based on a reasoned system or theory. Is there anything to find fault with in a belief which clings to the

idea that death makes but a slight and temporary rupture between the life we live and that within the veil, and which ascribes to those who are no longer beside us some share in our joys and sorrows here? It is a childlike confidence of this sort which we recognise in the Columban invocation of the saints; and here, as at other points, what strikes us in the Columban creed and usage is their openness and tenderness of thought, their sweet and loving if somewhat visionary simplicity, as of a child.

This beautiful simplicity, with its accompanying high strain of holy and self-forgetful life, links the Church of Columba to the very Church of the apostles, more directly perhaps than any quality of its doctrine or its government. In the family of Iona we mark that perfect guilelessness of the religious life—that singleness of heart—that childlike openness and earnestness, which we are accustomed to associate with the primitive Christianity of the apostles and their first followers, as special characteristics of the fresh and beautiful youth of the Church. As has been said of this mark of that spring-time, “All else has been repeated since, but this never. And this makes the religious man’s heart turn back with longing to that blessed time when the Lord’s service was the highest of all delights, and every act

of worship came fresh from the soul. If we compare degrees of devotion, it may perhaps be reckoned something intrinsically nobler to serve God and love Him now when religion is colder than it was, and when we have not the aid of those thrilling and heart-stirring sympathies which blest the early Church. But even if our devotion be sometimes nobler in itself, yet theirs still remains the more beautiful, the more attractive. Ours may have its own place in the sight of God, but theirs remains the irresistible example which kindles all other hearts by its fire."¹ Even in our own dull day the example does not lose its power. The Church still looks back to these ancient times for a renewal of its inspiration. Those of our own era, who have given the heartiest impulses to Christian life, have been men that have proved in their lives that they have drunk deep at the early founts of primitive zeal and love and faith. Those who have done most to impart fresh impetus to Christian devotion to the service of God and man—to raise the standard of Christian character and aim—have not been the theologians and controversialists, the ritualists and sacerdotalists, the philosophers and critics. They have been the great missionaries,—the men like Carey and Patteson, Moffat

¹ Bishop Temple, in 'Essays and Reviews.'

and Livingstone, Damien and Gordon, who showed that the devotion, the service, the stainless loyalty of the Christlike life, as those lived it who had been the first to follow the perfect Example, were their great ambition—who were, though living in this nineteenth century, in a true sense primitive Christians; for to be faithful followers of the primitive Church is not to be, as some aim at being, servile copyists of its practices, but to reproduce its spirit under the new conditions of our modern life.

It is the feeling that Columba and his friends were thus primitive in spirit, were thus near those who had been near the Lord, that endears their memory to us—that makes his name still a power for good after the lapse and the changes of more than 1200 years. They seem to us, certainly, men of clearer insight and directer communion with the Unseen than the controversial and argumentative "Fathers" of the Church, whether Greek or Latin. They do not speculate on the mysteries of the faith: they are content to believe though they cannot prove, and to trust where they cannot comprehend. The world was full of wonder and awe to them. It had secrets that transcended their philosophy, and which they believed were revealed to them that feared that Lord to whom they trusted for all needed revelation.

The Columban brethren were little affected by Patristic tradition or authority. They would not have understood, could they have known, the extreme deference paid by the modern traditionalist to the testimony of the "Fathers." Their own theology was of a more natural type than that of the schools of either Alexandria or Carthage. They lived in a more primitive society; they were in closer communion with free nature; they moved amid an atmosphere fuller of "the freshness of an earlier world," than that of Hellenic philosophy or Latin dogmatism.

After all, were the "Fathers" entitled to the mental subjection which the place accorded to them in the ecclesiastical world seemed to demand? As interpreters of the religion of Jesus of Nazareth, they wanted the personal knowledge of contemporaries which the apostles had enjoyed, on the one hand; and they lacked the calm judgment which results from long historical experience and critical inquiry, on the other. The idea of a purely spiritual religion was yet in a great measure an alien novelty in the world around them. The air they breathed was still heavy with the incense that rose from heathen altars, and the smoke that hung over Jewish burnt-offerings. The manners and customs, on which they looked day by day, were stained with the viciousness of an unbridled

immorality. They were themselves, in many cases, men who bore in their own characters marks which were not those of the Lord Jesus, and whose impress was no sign of their being trustworthy guides in interpreting Holy Writ, or entering into the arcana of spiritual truth: men, for example, such as Origen, whose minds were deeply engrained with oriental mysticism; like Cyril, whose hearts were inflamed with the hot passions and ambitions of a nature yet half savage; like Augustine, all whose thoughts of God and man betrayed the harshness and jealousy of a nature warped, in its inmost fibres, by a youth of heathenish licentiousness. It was not from masters such as these that the Celtic pioneers of the Gospel learned the principles and the doctrine of Christ.

Nor was it from the bigoted precisians of *jure divino* episcopacy that they derived the system on which they administered the government and guided the free activities of their Church. No Church ever laboured in the cause of Christ which gave fuller proof of the effectiveness and validity of its ministry; none could more confidently have appealed to that test of the authenticity of its mission with which our Lord met the questions of John the Baptist's messengers.¹ Can any sane man believe that the presence of a few officials,

¹ Luke vii. 18-23.

unendowed with special gift or power, among the great company of workers and evangelists which formed the monastic family, was the element that consecrated their labour and guaranteed its efficacy? Could Columba, had he been twenty times a bishop, have done one whit more than he did for the spiritual life of the Scots and Picts? Could he have given more convincing proof of the apostolic character of his ministry?

The family of Iona exhibited, in a marked degree, a primitive union of ascetic simplicity and purity with the most active beneficence. Theirs was no "fugitive and cloistered virtue." They lived for others—"for ever roaming with a hungry heart" wherever the cry of human need and spiritual darkness called them. Our own islands offered too strait an outlet for their evangelistic ambition. Two great monks of Ireland led the way across the narrow seas, and carried the cross through Burgundy and Switzerland; but Gallus and Columbanus had a noble following in the first outflow of that stream of Scottish scholars and missionaries who, until a century after the Reformation, connected, by their living intercourse and labours, the religious life of our island with that of the Continental Churches. In Switzerland the people still pray for the Scots and Irish, not knowing why; but we know that the names made their way into

their liturgy because they were the first planters of Christianity in the Swiss valleys and the Burgundian plains. "It is touching," says one who has traced the footsteps of some of these early apostles of our Church,¹ "to discover memorials of these our own countrymen and spiritual sires, too long forgotten, among strange people and in the far-off places to which they had betaken themselves in their missionary zeal. I have known no deeper sensation than to find the traces of the Highland hand among the MSS. of Bobbio, and to come upon the Celtic dead in the cathedral of Tarentum."

But it was in Britain, of course, that the influence of Iona was most immediate and powerful,—first, in subduing the Northern Picts, and planting the Church throughout the whole country north of the Tweed; and next, in doing the same work in the regions south of that river—even as far as the borders of the kingdom of Kent. This extension of the Scotie Church had consequences so far-reaching, and so closely bound up with the future of the Christian religion both in Scotland and England, that we must attend to its character and results ere we pass on to the more special examination of the development of the Columban system, and its final decadence in the North.

¹ Bishop Ewing, *Memoir*, p. 430.

The early Roman Christianity of Southern Britain was all but extinguished, when the Saxons and Angles swarmed across the North Sea and attacked the timid natives, left defenceless by their Roman masters. England was paganised: Thor and Woden were worshipped where the Cross had stood. Weak bands of Christian fugitives found safety in the fastnesses of Wales and Cornwall. At last, in the autumn of 597—the year of Columba's death—a mission, conducted by Augustine, a Roman abbat, was despatched by Gregory the Great to win back Britain to the faith of Christ. The King of Kent, on whose shores the missionaries landed, received them kindly, and allowed them to establish themselves and build a church at Canterbury. Ere long he, with a multitude of his people, was baptised.

From Kent the message of the Cross was borne into the neighbouring kingdom of Essex, and ultimately penetrated to Northumbria, the northernmost of the Saxon kingdoms. A daughter of Ethelbert married Edwin, the Northumbrian king, and was accompanied to her new home by the bishop Paulinus, who founded and filled the see of York. It was at the council called by Edwin to hear the bishop's exposition of his faith that an aged thane contributed to the debate a short and touching apologue, which, often as it has been quoted,

is too beautiful and characteristic to be passed by. "When, O King! you and your ministers and warriors are seated at table in the winter, and the fire burns brightly on the hearth, perchance a sparrow, chased by the wind and snow, enters at one door of the hall and escapes by the other. Whilst it is within, it enjoys the warmth and light, but immediately vanishes from your sight, returning from one winter to another. So does this life of ours appear for a little while; but of what went before or what is to follow we know nothing. If, therefore, the new religion offers us here any certain knowledge, it deserves that we should follow it." "Suchlike discourses," says the Venerable Bede, "the other elders and king's counsellors, by divine inspiration, advanced;" and the result was that Northumbria too became, in name at least, one of the kingdoms of the Lord and of His Christ. But the triumph of the Gospel was short-lived. In October 633 Edwin went out to battle against Cædwalla, King of the Britons, and Penda, King of Mercia, the latter the fiercest and most powerful of the heathen Saxons. Edwin was slain, and his widow with her children, along with Paulinus, fled to her father's kingdom of Kent. The nascent Christianity of Northumbria disappeared, and the tide of evangelisation rolled backwards to the south.

During the seventeen years of Edwin's reign his nephew Oswald, who was the rightful heir of the Northumbrian dynasty, had lived in exile among the Scots. He resolved now to strike a blow for the recovery of his rights. With a small but chosen band he encountered, near Hexham, the hosts of the Britons who had overrun Northumbria, and utterly defeated them. Their leader fell; and they, quitting all their positions, fled westward, till they had placed the Severn, like a moat, between them and the possibility of pursuit. Northumbria welcomed Oswald to its throne; and the realm, consolidated under his sway, became the head of the whole Heptarchy.

During his Scottish exile Oswald had been admitted to the Church by the monks of Iona; and on the eve of his decisive battle the great Columba had appeared to him in a vision, and promised him the victory. It was not unnatural that, seeking ministers of the Word who should anew plant the Church in Northumbria, he should appeal to those who were his own spiritual fathers, the successors of the great Abbat of Iona. The appeal was heard, and the Celtic Church prepared itself to occupy the new field thus opened to its missionary enterprise. But "the first effort of their zeal," says Montalembert, "was not fortunate. Their first representative seems to have been animated by that spirit of

pedantic rigour, by that stubborn and intolerant austerity, which have often shown themselves in the national character of the Scots, along with Christian devotion and self-denial, and which culminated in the too-celebrated Puritans."

His name was Cormac; and after a futile attempt to gain an influence over the Angles, he returned to Iona to report his failure. As he recounted to the assembled fraternity his experiences and disappointment, a voice from among them exclaimed, "Brother, the fault was yours. You exacted from the barbarians more than their weakness could bear. You should first have stooped to their ignorance, and then have raised their minds to the divine maxims of the Gospel." The voice was Aidan's. His brethren recognised in him the man for the emergency. He was at once despatched to the south along with a company of assistant monks. With a touching remembrance of his island-home in the Hebrides, he established his dwelling, his church, his monastic discipline and order, on the Isle of Lindisfarne, which, under his apostolic ministry, became the Iona of the Anglo-Saxons.

From this centre the evangelical fervour of the Celtic bishop and his monks, aided by the influential zeal of the king, carried the doctrines and rites of Christianity far and wide over the north of England. But Oswald was soon cut

off. The terrible old pagan, Penda, again waged war against Northumbria; and on the 5th of August 642 Oswald fell in battle, crying as he fell, "Deus, miserere animabus." Disaster, divided succession, war, and confusion followed; but still the Cross made way.

Aidan too died; but a new bishop from Iona replaced him, Finan; and again on his death, after a ten years' episcopate, that nursery of apostles sent forth Colman to fill his vacant place. By this time Oswy, the brother of Oswald, was on the throne; and the kingdoms of Northumbria, of Essex, and of Mercia had been evangelised by the Celtic monks of the Columban order. The Roman mission, which had won Kent, had since that first conquest been comparatively ineffective. The Celtic mission, of which Iona was the birthplace, Lindisfarne the headquarters, and Aidan the leading spirit, had for years been the really active and aggressive Christian influence in almost every region of England, except Kent and the distant south and west.

The time of Roman revival and renewed organisation had now, however, arrived, and the man who was to rule the movement had appeared. He was a young Northumbrian noble of the name of Wilfrid. When yet in his teens he had chosen the monastic life, and had en-

tered Aidan's monastery at Lindisfarne. While learning there the discipline and the rites of the Church, according to the usages of the Columban brotherhood, it dawned upon him that there was an older centre of ecclesiastical authority than Iona, and that in some respects the traditions of Rome differed from those which Columba had brought with him from Ireland. He quitted Lindisfarne and made his way to the Eternal City, where he acquired a full knowledge of the usages from which the Celtic Church diverged, obtained the blessing of the Pope, and returned to England, bearing in the Roman tonsure, which he had adopted, the visible badge of his conviction of the just supremacy of the Papal See. Alchfrid, son of Oswy, had in the year 658 been associated with his father in the government of his kingdom. On hearing of Wilfrid's return from abroad, he sent for him. Oswy had been instructed by the Scottish monks; but his mother, Eanfleda, daughter of Edwin, had been trained by Paulinus the Roman, and the young prince, as was to be expected, was more inclined to the religious observances and beliefs of his mother than to those of his sire. He lent a willing ear to Wilfrid's teaching, and turning the Celtic monks out of the monastery which he had founded at Ripon, he installed his tutor in their room. In this place of power

Wilfrid began openly and eagerly to urge the rules of Rome and to preach the duty of Catholic uniformity.

The conflict between Rome and Iona, Ripon and Lindisfarne, soon became general and violent, and at last, at the summons of King Oswy, the representatives of the two great parties came to Whitby to fight it out. The question of the tonsure was not mooted, though it had stirred keen enough feeling. The tonsure had originated with the first coenobites of the East, who had shaved their heads in token, according to oriental custom, of humiliation and affliction. When monasticism spread, and monks came to fill the highest offices in the Church, the practice of shaving the head continued, though its origin was lost sight of; and as clerical garb and usage acquired individuality, the tonsure became one of the marks of the sacerdotal order. But the oriental "clean shave" was not observed in the West. The priests of Rome shaved only the crown of the head; those of the Celtic Church shaved the forehead in a wide circle from ear to ear. The Romans said their practice came down to them from Simon Peter, and that the practice of the Celts had come down from Simon Magus. But bitter and personal as was the feeling upon this knotty point, the attention of the conference was con-

centrated upon the more urgent difficulty of the Easter celebration, and it seems to have been understood that the decision upon it would rule that upon any other matter in dispute.

The early Eastern Christians used to celebrate Easter on the day of the Hebrew Passover, which was held on the 14th of the first Jewish month. The Western Churches celebrated it on the Sunday following the day of the Passover. The Council of Nice decided in favour of this usage; and those who, in spite of the decision, still adhered to the 14th were considered heretical, and went by the name of "Quartodecimans," or *Fourteenthers*. It was not upon this point, however, that the dispute at Whitby turned. The Celts were not Quartodecimans. They simply were, like the Russians at the present day, wedded to the "Old Style," and prejudiced against the New. The New Style had been adopted by the Roman Church about the middle of the sixth century, at a time when the Christians of Britain were almost wholly cut off, through their local and domestic troubles, from intercourse with the Churches of the Continent. Isolated communities, whether ecclesiastical or social, become bound to their own forms and traditions; and when intercourse began to be renewed, the Celts were not disposed to give in to what they considered a Roman novelty.

It had been determined by the Council of Nice that the astronomers of Alexandria should make the necessary computation for fixing the date on which in each year the Easter festival should occur, and should intimate the result to the Roman Pontiff, who in turn should notify it to the remoter Churches. This plan, however, did not work well. The Romans sometimes questioned the accuracy of the Egyptian calculations, and departed from them; and it was not until after nearly two hundred years of divergency and dispute that the uniform method of reckoning was adopted which is still in force, and which restricts the paschal celebration to the interval between the 22d of March and the 25th of April. To this method the Celts did not conform; and as a consequence their Easter from time to time fell on another day than that on which the Roman churches were celebrating it. They also refused to begin their Lenten fast on Ash Wednesday, according to the Roman usage, and deferred it till the Monday of the following week, thus abbreviating the proper period of forty days. A variety in practice is often felt to be more intolerable than a divergence in doctrine, and King Oswy no doubt was irritated and annoyed when, in the midst of the festivity and gladness of his Celtic Easter, he saw his queen with all her court still practis-

ing the austerities of her Roman Lent. Personal feelings, family unity, social order, as well as religious prejudice, were all involved in this Easter question. It was determined that a council should be summoned to decide it. The council met at Streaneschalch, now Whitby, in 663, and within the monastery which had been founded there five years before by Hilda, a daughter of the royal family of Deira, who had taken the vows of a nun, and who was now Abbess of Streaneschalch, which soon became frequented and famous under her rule.

According to a common Celtic usage the monastery afforded religious shelter to both monk and nun, dwelling in houses adjacent yet apart, but owning the one common authority of the abbess. King Oswy of Northumbria proposed to hold under Hilda's roof this conference, which, he hoped, might adjust the differences between the rules and usages of Rome and those of Iona. Hilda acquiesced; and the king arrived at Whitby to preside in the assembly, accompanied by Alchfrid his son, followed by Bishop Colman from Lindisfarne, and a great company of the Celtic clergy: while the Roman party were led by Agilbert, formerly Bishop of Wessex, but now the friend and companion of Alchfrid; by the young Wilfrid, and by two aged priests, in one of whom the spec-

tators recognised James the deacon, who alone of all the Christian clergy had stood fast by his post at York, when Paulinus the bishop and all the rest fled southward before the heathen Penda, who had slain King Edwin and embroiled his kingdom, some thirty years before.

King Oswy presided in the conference. In those days there were no troublesome theories of Church and State. The Church strove to imbue the whole people with Christian faith and order, and accepted without scruple whatever help in this work "the secular arm" could bring. So Oswy "took the chair" as of right, and called on his bishop, Colman, to open the debate. Cedd, bishop of the East Saxons, was to act as interpreter for the Celts, who did not understand Latin or the Anglo-Saxon tongue; and Wilfrid was to speak on behalf of the Anglo-Saxons, as Bishop Agilbert possessed their language but indifferently. "We all," said Oswy, "serve one God, and should observe one rule of life; and as we all expect one kingdom of heaven, we ought not to differ in the celebration of the Divine mysteries, but rather to inquire which is the truest tradition, that we all may follow it." The debate then proceeded between Colman and Wilfrid; the one founding his argument on the personal usage of his predecessors, and the peculiar tradition of the Celtic Church, derived,

as he maintained, from S. John; the other on the Catholic practice of all other Churches, and the authority of S. Peter, the prince of the apostles, and of S. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles. The argument was not on either side very logical or cogent; but on Colman's it scarcely moved from the austere and tenacious assertion of the obligation of the example of S. John and the holy abbat Columba. In the true spirit of ecclesiastical conservatism and Celtic clansmanship, his key-note was, "We cannot change the customs of our fathers." "Can we admit," he demanded, "that our most venerable father Columba and his successors, men beloved of God, have acted contrary to the Divine Word?" "Beloved of God, I doubt not," replied Wilfrid, "and serving Him in their rustic simplicity, with pious hearts; and because knowing no better, sinning not in keeping Easter on a wrong day. But as little do I doubt that if a Catholic calculator had come to them, they would have followed his admonitions as readily as they are known to have kept those commandments of God, which they believed to have come to them from Him. But you, who now know the decrees of the Apostolic See—nay, of the Catholic Church—sin inasmuch as you refuse to obey." "And as to Columba, holy as he was," said Wilfrid, perhaps unwittingly clinch-

ing the argument, "is he to be preferred to the most blessed prince of the apostles, to whom our Lord said, 'Thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'; and 'To thee I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven'?" "Colman," said Oswy, turning to the Celtic bishop, "is it true that these words were spoken to Peter by our Lord?" "It is true, O king!" confessed Colman. "Can you show any such power given to your Columba?" was the next question. "No," said Colman. "Do you both agree then," pursued Oswy, "that these words were addressed specially to Peter, and that the keys of heaven were given to him by our Lord?" "We do," was the answer of both. "Then," said the king, "I too say he is the doorkeeper, whom I will in nowise contradict, but in all things, so far as I know and am able, will obey; lest when I come to the door of the heavenly kingdom, there should be none to open it for me, he being my adversary who is proved to have the keys."

"The whole assembly," says Bede, "assented to the royal decision." The clergy and the laity, nobles and commoners, with uplifted hands accepted and confirmed the sentence.

The Celtic Easter was doomed. On this quaint notion of King Oswy's, suggested by the

most unspiritual interpretation of our Lord's language, hinged the future of the British Church. The great wave of Celtic influence, which, rolling down from Iona to Lindisfarne, and swelled by another current spreading outward from Bangor on the Dee, had wellnigh submerged all England, was stemmed at Whitby. It was long ere it wholly receded; but the retrocession began here. Cedd conformed to the Roman order, and returned to his bishopric at London; but Colman, true to the traditions of Columba, and too proud to change, quitted Lindisfarne for ever, and taking with him the bones of Aidan, went back disconsolate and defeated to Iona. With him the Celtic independence and individuality that had broadly stamped the religion of England with its own character retired towards the North, henceforth destined to recede ever farther and farther before the Anglo-Roman advance, until every vestige of the early Scottish peculiarities had vanished, and Iona had become but a memory and a name.¹

While Colman shrank away into obscurity,

¹ "The independence of the Celtic missionary is a patent fact. . . . The missionaries owed allegiance not to the Bishop of Rome, but to the Presbyter-Abbat of Iona. There is no evidence that they sought or accepted any authoritative directions from the Roman mission in the south of England. Their usages were different in many respects from the usages of Rome. When these came under discussion, and it was a question between allegiance to Iona and allegiance to Rome, they unhesitatingly chose the former."—Bishop Lightfoot's *Leaders of the Northern Church*: 1. *The Celtic Mission*.

Wilfrid withdrew from the conference to enter on a conspicuous but stormy career of forty years, in which he was to be the champion of the Papal See, and through many apostolic labours, ecclesiastical strifes, civil discords, and personal vicissitudes, to extend and consolidate the Anglo-Saxon Church under the broad uniformity and discipline of Rome. "England owed it to him," says Montalembert, in the eulogy he has pronounced on one whom he evidently held in highest honour among his heroes of the Church, "that she was not only Christian, but Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman. No other Anglo-Saxon exercised a more decisive and more sovereign influence on the destinies of his race."

Among the forces that have moulded Anglo-Saxon life and character, S. Wilfrid claims a foremost place. The ruins of the Norman abbey which occupy the site of Hilda's monastery, and crown the cliff above the gay and busy town of Whitby, form one of the most noteworthy landmarks in the history of England.

This Roman victory had nothing to do with any question of the Orders of the Celtic Church. The purity and validity of these were never questioned by the Anglo-Roman party. Bede, who was a keen Romanist, though he notes with disapproval the subjection of the Celtic bishops to the abbats, suggests no doubt of the character

and efficiency of the monastic ministry. He relates how Oswald sent for a bishop "to the elders of the Scots," that he might instruct the Northumbrians¹ in the faith. He never questions the propriety of Oswald's doing so, or the right of the Scots' elders to comply. He knew that Iona did not own the jurisdiction of Rome, but he did not regard this as invalidating Iona's power to organise a mission to Northumbria. Rome's claim to be the sole fountain of ecclesiastical prerogative and evangelistic grace had not yet been formulated with the arrogance which marks it at the present day.²

¹ The kingdom of Northumbria contained two provinces,—Deira, stretching from the Humber to the Tees; and Bernicia, stretching from the Tees to the Forth.

² "All the priests of Iona together with the abbats could ordain no bishop whatsoever. The consecration of every bishop must be by another bishop; and the bulls of consecration can alone be issued by the Holy Roman See, which is the centre of apostolic unity, power, and jurisdiction."—The Monks of Iona, by J. Stewart M'Corry, D.D., p. 103.

"The Catholic faith teaches that the Roman Pontiff is in possession of *direct* and *immediate* ordinary jurisdiction over every baptised person. His jurisdiction over every Christian, man and woman, is *ordinary*, to use an ecclesiastical phrase—that is to say, jurisdiction belongs to him in virtue of his office, and he has power to delegate his jurisdiction. In other words, every Catholic lives in subjection to two bishops. He is directly subject to the local prelate within whose diocese he has his dwelling. He is also as directly subject to the episcopal jurisdiction of that universal Bishop—*cujus diocesis est orbis terrarum*—whose diocese is the world, or, in other words, is world-wide."—Humphreys' Recollections of Scotch Episcopalianism (a curious autobiographic history of a passage to Rome).

No incident in the history of our Church recalls more vividly the first missionary enterprises of Antioch and Jerusalem than the despatch of Cormac from Iona, at Oswald's desire—his return and report of his failure—the council of the brotherhood—the criticism of Aidan, and its result in his own undertaking the unsuccessful work. As we study the picture, we seem to be again in the assembly of the apostles and elders, marking their cordial conference, their wise counsel, their readiness to go forth on the Church's errand at the brethren's wish. The college of elders in Iona is recognised as the sole depository and source of the authority bestowed on Cormac, on Aidan, on Finan, on Colman—on all those apostolic emissaries who, Bede tells us, were appointed and sent out from "the island which is called Hii." Imbued as he was with Roman prejudice—regretting as he did the "ordo inusitatus" which regulated their government—Bede could not deny that the monks of Iona, by whomsoever or according to whatsoever rite ordained or consecrated, exercised an episcopate which no one could gainsay. At no time did the ministry of the Scots bear the stamp of more unquestioned apostolicity than in those days of unworldly devotion and communion with the unseen, of intense missionary earnestness, of free individual action, and close fraternal union under their patriarchal head.